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SUBJECT: UK INITIATIVES HARNESS DIASPORA CAPACITY

¶1. (U) Summary. The UK has initiated a number of programs to help engage UK-based Diaspora groups and harness their expertise in international development. Under the direction of the Department for International Development (DFID), and the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), these programs are typically focused on building the capacity of already existing Diaspora organizations and range from advice and support roles to funding and sponsorship. These programs assist Diaspora groups in managing substantive projects and providing technical support to countries including Somalia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. End Summary.

¶2. (U) DFID has become increasingly interested in the success of its programs that work directly with Diaspora groups to provide aid and development in targeted countries throughout the world. It finds that Diaspora groups bring a range of skills and assets to the partnership including a "specialized knowledge of need, an ability to work within and across both cultures, and an ability to command the trust of the communities in their homelands." Furthermore, Diaspora volunteers who work in tandem with those providing aid in target countries transfer valuable knowledge and skills back to their country of heritage. By capitalizing upon the language and cultural skills, as well as the commitment, of Diaspora groups, these initiatives have been successful in supporting development initiatives.

The Diaspora Volunteering Programme

¶3. (U) A joint Department for International Development (DFID) and VSO initiative, the Diaspora Volunteering Program completed its pilot program in 2008 in which it worked with at least 18 organizations and sent over 270 volunteers to target countries. It has since received an additional GBP 3 million (USD 5 million) to carry the project forward for the next 5 years. The program provides funding and technical support to build the capacity of Diaspora organizations based in the UK and assist them in developing and managing their own volunteering programs. Benefits to fledgling Diaspora groups include pilot phase research and implementation; assistance in the recruitment and training of new volunteers; fundraising and sustainability support; in-country support from DFID program offices; and assistance in raising awareness within their communities. The program provides funding for qualifying organizations to perform research, visit to the target country and implement initial phases of development programs.

¶4. (U) Diaspora groups qualify for funding if they are a registered charity with a functioning governance structure

that reflect the "Diaspora led character" of the organization and which have a "clear link with a critical mass of Diaspora" within the UK. Diaspora groups must commit to a number of stipulations in order to receive funds. These include the development of a "capacity building plan," attendance at bi-monthly training sessions, and submission of information to program leaders for monitoring and evaluation.

Successful projects have included a project to create urban resource centers that provide career skills to poor youth in slum communities of India; a project to provide specialized health care for the elderly in Nepal; and a program to provide targeted business support such as accounting, business planning and logistics in Ghana.

The Diaspora Volunteering Alliance

15. (U) The Diaspora Volunteering Alliance seeks to bring together the leadership of UK Diaspora groups in an effort to share best practices, coordinate assistance efforts and provide a united front in tackling international development issues. Benefits to Diaspora groups include networking and sharing of best practices; collective advocacy efforts for funding and government access; and input into appropriations of available funds. The alliance consists of 18 voting member organizations and meets directly with DFID and VSO directors to steer future projects and funding. It provides a valuable platform for the sharing of skills and best practices with other Diaspora groups and allows common problems to be addressed with a unity of purpose.

The Common Ground Initiative

16. (U) Under the direction of "Comic Relief" and co-funded by DFID, the Common Ground Initiative is a GBP 20 million (USD 33 million) fund supporting African development. It is mainly a grant offering platform for small or Diaspora-led organizations working in the UK to alleviate poverty in African countries. Grants are offered for organizations that specialize in offering health, education or enterprise programs and are designed to build the capacity of the Diaspora organizations as well as increase the long-term sustainability of their work. As part of the program a study will run alongside the grants to better understand the role played by UK Diaspora in development.

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